

An Update on Guzoo Animal Farm

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for

**World Society for the Protection of Animals (Canada)
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About the Authors

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Sian Waters received her B.A. from the University College of North Wales, Bangor and her M.Phil. from the Department of Biological Sciences, University College of Swansea.

Ms. Waters has a wealth of experience working with animals. She is the former Scientific Officer of the Bristol Zoological Gardens, where she was responsible for daily management of the mammal section, including a team of up to 16 keeping staff. She was also Chair of the PSGB Conservation Working Party, Chair of the European Tapir and Hippo Taxon Advisory Group, core member of the UK Zoo Research Group and consultant to zoos in Belize, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

Prior to her employment at Bristol, Ms. Waters was Mammal Curator at the Bioparco S.p.A. (formerly the Rome Zoo) in Italy, where she was involved in the development and implementation of animal husbandry and management programs, environmental enrichment programs and keeper workshops.

Most recently, Sian Waters has served as a Scientific Consultant to the Cochrane Ecological Institute in Alberta and a consultant to the World Wildlife Fund International regarding their projects database for large carnivores.

Clio Smeeton

Clio Smeeton is President of the internationally renowned Cochrane Ecological Institute (CEI) in Alberta. The CEI is a family founded, charitable organization devoted to breeding endangered species for reintroduction, wildlife rescue, rehabilitation and release, education of the public, and developing non-intrusive wildlife survey methods.

CEI initiated the swift fox reintroduction program in Canada in 1972. It holds the world's longest established and largest captive swift fox breeding colony.

World Society for the Protection of Animals

The World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) is an international organization established to promote animal welfare and conservation around the world. WSPA represents more than 400,000 individual members and 400 member associations in 91 countries, WSPA has consultative status with the United Nations, observer status with the Council of Europe, and offices in Australia, Canada, Columbia, Costa Rica, Denmark, Germany, Kenya, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

An Update on Guzoo Animal Farm

Siân S. Waters & Clio Smeeton,

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Our visit took place on Monday 19th November 2001. The facility is extremely exposed to weather and there are no plantings or windbreaks in the zoo area, although there are some trees at the entrance to the house and grounds. It was a cold blustery day and on our arrival, we were greeted by Mr Gustafson himself. We did not make the purpose of our visit known to him and we began our tour as he went into his house for his lunch. Mr Gustafson was surrounded by dogs (Beagles) and said that the dogs would escort us around his facility, which they did.

Despite the day being very cold and extremely windy, the smell of inadequately maintained enclosures (faeces, urine, carcasses) was startling. It was so strong that it remained with us after our visit, filling the cab of the truck.

Entrance Area

At the entrance was an enclosure holding a female lama and her youngster. We declined Mr Gustafson's offer to enter this area. There were also a miniature donkey and pony in this area. Within the enclosure was a pen holding a young dog that yelped for our attention when he saw us. A goat also appeared from a back area. Within this area was an extremely small wooden cage with a bobcat cub inside. This animal had about a metre wide area in which it paced back and forth. This was a hand-reared animal so Mr Gustafson informed us later. The cage was far too small and would not allow this young animal to exercise sufficiently in order to develop its musculature and cognitive abilities.

A covered area held a skunk, a goat kid, and guinea pigs. The water dishes in this area were clean. The area was very dark towards the back where the skunk was kept; the shelters within these enclosures were badly chewed and showed splintered wood around the holes. The aforementioned dog's pen backed onto this area and although the dog could not be seen, it continued to whimper for attention and scratch on the wooden wall.

Next was the petting area. There was a strong smell of ammonia in this building. Rabbits were numerous and underfoot. There were two pot-bellied pigs. One female was in a very small pen suckling two piglets under a heat lamp. There was no water present. The other individual was in a similar sized pen and water was present but dirty. There was a small calf in a tiny enclosure. The ducks in this area had an inadequate and dirty supply of water. The worst case, however, was a lizard (possibly a spiny lizard). This individual was lying motionless under a lamp. It was too hot and the animal appeared dehydrated. Some kind of dried pellet such as dog chow had been offered which is not the correct diet for such an animal. In our opinion, this animal was in a distressed state.

There were notices on some domestic cat cages warning pregnant women not to touch them. Presumably because of the danger of toxoplasmosis.

Primate Area

These 7 cages were all very similar and were about 2.5 m long by 1.2 m wide. They were

about 2.5 m high. This space could be utilised to increase the overall surface area of these enclosures with the addition of appropriate cage furniture such as perching, ropes, bungee cords, etc. However, in their present condition this space is not used. The small amount of perching present was old and had not been replaced for years. The substrate was soil and grass, which makes it ideal for scatter feeding with sunflower seeds etc which we suggested to Mr Gustafson. This would improve the quality of life for these primates quite substantially.

A female spider monkey was held in one cage and two male capuchin monkeys were kept singly in adjacent cages. One had an open wound at the base of his throat which he continually touched. This should be treated. I was unable to determine whether or not it was a case of self-wounding caused by stress which often develops in psychologically damaged primates. There was also a male Barbary macaque. All these primates were ex-pets and it would be extremely difficult to try to integrate them with conspecifics. However, they still need social contact which means that they should have a “stress free” relationship with a keeper.

Primates were not the only group exhibited in this line of cages; they were interspersed with a cockatoo, a very nervous lynx and a serval (in cages which needed enrichment specific to small cat species). The latter animal is housed in a completely unsuitable area with no opportunity to exhibit any of its natural behaviours. There was also no area for the carnivores to hide if they felt stressed by public viewing. These cages were not the worst in the zoo, but that does not mean that they were suitable for the species they housed. We were unable to see the indoor accommodation.

A female moose calf had access to the area between the front of these cages and the public barrier, a space of approximately 1.25 m. This could lead to an injury to this individual. Whilst we were there she sniffed the hand of the Barbary macaque who removed it from her then, but next time might not. Barbary macaques are stocky, powerful monkeys that could easily cause injury to the calf.

The Japanese macaques were in a very small and dirty area. There were one pair held together, an old male on his own and a young male housed alone. Mr Gustafson told us that he was afraid to risk putting the young male in with the elder one due to them fighting. He also told us he intended to make a new enclosure for these primates.

Carnivores

The big cat cages were full of faeces. The tigers’ water was frozen and the male lion was pacing in what we assumed was the introduction or separation area between the two big cat exhibits. There were two young lionesses in the main lion cage. Pieces of carcass were present. Carcass feeding is to be applauded as it provides substantial enrichment for big cats and ensures the health of their teeth and gums. It is common in European zoos and they do not encounter many problems with big cat dentition as a result. Both big cat areas were too dark. All cat cages were undersized and in serious need of enrichment. Mr Gustafson invited us to enter a lynx cage to pet the pacing individual inside but we declined his offer.

The canid cages were also too small, but had an earth substrate, which meant the animals could dig if the impacted soil was first dug over by a keeper to loosen it. We were

accompanied on our tour by Mr Gustafson's domestic dogs. The younger animals spent time running up and down in front of the wolves. From a disease transmission aspect the presence of domestic dogs is severely problematic and is not advisable. Carcasses and lots of faeces were present in all canid enclosures. As pointed out above carcass feeding is to be applauded from a welfare viewpoint; however carcass remains should be removed after 4 days and probably more frequently during hot weather. Endo- and ecto-parasites are a potential problem if road kill is fed.

The bear pen was not secure from our point of view. We felt that a black bear could easily climb out should it wish to. The enclosure was an acceptable size but needed a lot of cage furniture to enrich it. It was situated on a very windy hillside with all four sides open and no windbreak.

A fisher was being held in a small wooden cage up on the hill. This holding area was unsatisfactory from a safety and welfare aspect and it seemed to be difficult to clean this cage without the animal escaping. The dogs accompanying us were intent on barking at the fisher, and could get right up to all sides of its cage to do so.

By far the worst housed animals were the raccoons. There were at least two pairs housed in horrendous circumstances. All animals observed were overweight. One enclosure had raw burgers and meat in a plastic bag on the dirty floor. The wooden part of the inside area was in a very bad state of repair and a member of the public could have put their hand in very easily. An employee of Mr Gustafson's told us that they had sold 11 raccoons the week prior to our visit. There are still too many.

Ungulates

From a behavioural point of view, ungulates are relatively easy to keep. However, some species are very easily stressed and must be carefully handled.

We noted that both camels were in excellent body condition. Hay was in good condition and being fed from a round hay feeder. A very high safety barrier was in the process of being put in place in front of all ungulate species housed around the zoo's perimeter. The barrier was over 2 m in height and should be sufficient to protect both animals and public.

The condition of the kulan and bison gave cause for concern. They were too thin and the kulan's coat was very patchy. Attached to the front of the kulan's fence was a container of "bird" seed which is presumably to be fed to these individuals. This should be removed immediately as it is an unhygienic and unsuitable food for this species. This practice will presumably be discontinued when the safety barrier is fully installed.

There was a young male elk housed in a small enclosure which had no safety barrier thus making it dangerous should the elk put his antlers through the wire fence. The caribou had no water.

The female moose calf was small for its age, had no cover whatsoever, and there was no browse provided for it or its deer companion. We saw no hay, feed, saltlick or water dish in the enclosure. The enclosure was clearly not purpose built, but comprised an empty space surrounded by the backs of other buildings, enclosures (the ones containing the lama, whining

dog, bobcat cub), as well as the primate enclosure. It also included an area of waste space, which appeared to be used for storage, so water, hay and feed dishes could have been out of sight. Mr. Gustafson informed us that Alberta Environment (Fish & Wildlife Dept.) had “given him” the moose calf.

The sika deer paddock was open on all sides on a very windy hill. Alarmingly, this paddock had a great deal of farm machinery stored in it. This would be lethal to these animals if something should frighten them and they start running, as they could easily damage themselves on this machinery.

Hay feeders were provided for all ungulates in the perimeter paddocks. However, the hay for the yak was spread on the ground. This was because their horns would not fit between the bars of the hay feeder.

Birds

There was a very low cage at the entrance gate holding pigeons. It was overcrowded and the perching available was inadequate for the number of birds. Unfortunately, the clean water dish was placed underneath the perches so it would not remain clean for too long. Food was scattered on the floor which is not hygienic.

There were also Canada geese in another area with a pond. This area was very muddy and the small pond was frozen over. Some of the birds were pinioned.

Emergency Procedure

During our visit the adult male Himalayan tahr jumped over two fences and began to fight with the male mouflon. Before we could react, the mouflon became momentarily impaled on the tahr’s very sharp horns. We ran to get help and Mr Gustafson came out of his house to meet us as he realised something was wrong. We explained the situation and he immediately left, with an employee in his vehicle, for the mouflon enclosure. The tahr was removed from the mouflon enclosure by opening the gate of the mouflon enclosure and the tahr enclosure and hoping the animal entered the appropriate enclosure. This worked reasonably well as we were the only two visitors in the zoo at that time and we were both experienced animal professionals. However, on a day when there would be a lot of visitors this would be far from satisfactory. The most worrying aspect of this incident is that Mr Gustafson had to describe what the tahr were and where they were located to his employee. We later asked this person if he was a keeper. He replied that he wasn’t and just gave Mr Gustafson a hand. We also observed him teasing a capuchin monkey later on.

The mouflon did not show any visible signs of injury. However, it would have been advisable to call a vet to anaesthetise the animal to check its injuries because it was actually impaled on the tahr’s horns at least once and may have suffered injuries to internal organs. Mr Gustafson observed the animal for a short while – the animal showed no sign of injury but, as is often the case, it could have displayed signs of injury later that day or evening. Mr. Gustafson then related to us how he had lost a sika doe to stress a few days after the animals had to be herded into another enclosure for handling. Any herding which might have to be done in their present enclosure would expose them to entanglement in the agricultural machinery (harrows, mower blades, etc.) stored there.

There were no handling facilities for the mouflon (or any other ungulate) in any of their paddocks. According to Mr Gustafson there was a handling facility elsewhere which the animals had to be driven to. We saw no sign of it. The mouflon, tahr and Barbados sheep would have had to be driven right past the wolf and big cat enclosures to get anywhere. This is extremely unsatisfactory for ungulate management, particularly for sensitive species such as sika deer and mouflon. We were also worried that the male tahr would just jump back in to the mouflon paddock as no precautions were taken to ensure that it did not happen again. In fact, Mr Gustafson tried to convince us that the tahr had squeezed through a square of wire in the fence.

After spending some time talking to us, Mr Gustafson left along with his employee to pick up three road-killed deer. This left the zoo unattended and there were visitors at the time albeit in small numbers. The visitors had brought their own food with them to feed the animals. Apart from the fact that there is no control on what and how much an animal eats, animal feeding by visitors is risky as there have been incidents in other facilities where animals have been fed razor blades embedded in food items. Zoos should always be supervised. Under no circumstances should visitors be left alone on zoo property.

Education

There were plastic signs for native species, such as coyote and wolf, which appeared to be designed by Alberta's Watchable Wildlife, and produced by Alberta Environment. At least this gave some information about native species but also signals the province of Alberta's apparent approval that this is how its native wildlife should be kept.

There was a large and costly sign over the entrance to the zoo as you left the parking area in front of Mr. Gustafson's house, and two prominently displayed signs below it saying that the facility was inspected weekly by a "zoological veterinarian" and that the facility had been "inspected by Zoocheck"

The educational value of this zoo is negligible. Not only is it negligible, it is detrimental as animals housed there are managed and displayed appallingly. This only leads the public to believe that such conditions are the norm. There were often no identification labels apart from those mentioned. In any case, none of the species being kept are exhibited in a way that could be considered educational.

Welfare Issues to be Addressed with Urgency

- Shelter is inadequate for many species and many enclosures are without even plantings or windbreaks to shelter the animals from the weather. This should be corrected immediately.
- Many cages were far too small for the species housed in them. All undersized enclosures should be expanded.
- Many cages were filthy, and none of the faeces produced by their inmates had been cleared up for some time. All faeces and debris should be removed on a regular basis.
- Many cages, particularly in the case of the raccoons, were crumbling, with exposed wire ends, chewed and splintered wood. All damaged areas of caging should be immediately fixed or replaced.

- Inadequate separation facilities for most species. All enclosures housing potentially dangerous species should be equipped with secure secondary containment areas.
- No environmental enrichment for any species, even of a simple kind. A formal environmental enrichment program should be developed and implemented.
- Little consideration given to the behavioural and physical needs of the animals, beyond providing food (often the wrong kind of food and presented inappropriately).
- Many cages had inadequate water provision. All animals should have access to fresh, potable water at all times.
- Animal feeding by the public was allowed. This should be stopped immediately.
- Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (Fish and Wildlife) SHOULD NOT send native wildlife to this facility.
- A trained, professional zookeeper should be hired.

General Safety and Hygiene Aspects of Serious Concern

- Holding areas for potentially dangerous animals - used to close the animals off in order for cleaning, to take place - were in very short supply. This is as much to reduce stress for the animals as to ensure keeper safety.
- As a consequence of the above, lack of holding areas should mean that double doors into cages and enclosures should then be in use. We did not observe any. This shortfall should be corrected immediately.
- Animal faeces were often underfoot on public pathways. A regular program of cleaning should be carried out.
- No supervision for the public in any area and, as mentioned earlier, the owner and his employee left the zoo completely unattended whilst they went to pick up road kill. Under no circumstances should a zoo be left unattended, especially while visitors are on the premises.
- All domestic dog and cat access to the zoo itself should be eliminated due to the high risk of disease transmission.
- Regular worming schedules should be in place, particularly for the carnivores who may be at risk of heavy endoparasite and ectoparasite infestation from road kill carcasses.
- Public contact with potentially dangerous animals, such as young lynx, should be stopped. It is stressful for the animals, potentially dangerous to both animal and human and has potential to spread disease. Toxoplasmosis is a concern for pregnant women.

Conclusion

This zoo compares unfavourably to some zoos in the developing world who possess far less resources and have far more serious problems to overcome. It would appear that the Province of Alberta takes less interest in their zoos than many governments in the developing world do in theirs. Many animals at Guzoo are still not having even their basic needs met.